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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1904  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0076  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0363  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0814  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0067  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0831  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0253  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/10/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [KISL](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: SECTARIAN VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN THE SOUTH

REF: ISLAMABAD 2218

CLASSIFIED BY: Michael Spangler, Principal Officer, Amconsul  
Peshawar, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

#### SUMMARY

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11. (SBU) After a relatively quiet five years, the Northwest Frontier Province's (NWFP) southern district of Hangu erupted in sectarian violence on February 9, the tenth day of Muharram. Two bomb blasts, reportedly caused by suicide bombers, shattered a Shi'a procession around noon, killing thirty-one people and leaving dozens seriously injured. Gunfire quickly broke out, escalating to heavy weapon use; angry mobs torched the city's main bazaar; and violence lasted throughout the night. The Pakistan Army has been mobilized to seal off the city and impose a curfew. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Shortly after the explosions ripped through the Shi'a procession, gunfire broke out between rival Sunni and Shi'a groups, claiming the lives of four innocent bystanders in the first hour. District Nazim Ghani-ur Rehman appealed to Kohat Army Commander Major General Gul Mohammed to impose a curfew and seal off the city before violence escalated further. However, Army units could not arrive in time to prevent protestors from taking to the streets and torching the Hangu Bazaar. Once taking up their positions around the city, the Army witnessed heavy weapons fire throughout the night until around 0900 today.

13. (SBU) NWFP Governor Khalil ur-Rehman is meeting with Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Ehsan ul-Haq today to ensure adequate assets are in place to prevent the spread of violence to the adjoining Kurram and Orakzai Agencies containing Shi'a/Sunni-divided populations. In addition, the NWFP government has moved swiftly to appoint an investigation committee headed by a Peshawar High Court Judge and announced compensation for the dead and injured.

14. (SBU) In a related development, sectarian violence broke out in Tank District (adjoining South Waziristan) on February 6. A Sunni mob attacked a Shi'a procession, reportedly injuring several participants. Arrests by local police stamped out the violence. Elsewhere in the NWFP, Muharram has been marked by tense calm and heightened security.

COMMENT

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15. (C) Hangu is not new to sectarian violence. In 2001, the GOP imposed a military curfew on the city, after sectarian violence claimed sixteen lives. In 1997, fourteen died in a similar outbreak. This time, the GOP has moved much faster and more decisively than in the past, probably calculating that such efforts are essential to preserve the peace in Kurram and Orakzai. Nonetheless, the GOP's writ of authority may be challenged if the relatively large loss of life spurs a wave of revenge attacks.

16. (C ) Over the past three years, the NWFP's Muttahida Majlis-e Amal (MMA) government has often taken credit for fostering sectarian harmony. The Hangu violence throws the MMA's claim into doubt. Just as importantly, the reported suicide bombings are raising concerns here that Islamist militant groups are poised to use this weapon more widely in the NWFP. The NWFP continues to be wracked by a rising tempo of protests, initially sparked by the Bajaur incident, recently sustained by the European cartoon publications, and now possibly cresting with sectarian violence. END COMMENT.

SPANGLER